



Feast of St. Joseph 2021

Dear Friends,

Tuesday 23 March will mark the first anniversary of the National Lockdown. It will be a day for remembrance and lament for us as Christians as we reflect on the terrible damage that the Covid-19 pandemic has wrought across our nation and our world.

We as Christians will pray for the repose of the souls of over 125,000 people who have died in the UK alone after testing positive for Covid-19, and so many more world-wide, each one a beloved and precious child of God, mourned by family and friends. We offer our devotional video on praying for the dead [\[link\]](#) as a support and a comfort to those who grieve (1).

We will also pray for those who have fallen ill to this disease, especially those with the chronic symptoms of long Covid. We will pray for those who face financial ruin or debt because of the loss of jobs or businesses.

We will pray for deprived urban communities, many served by Society parishes, who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and those families who are coping with hunger and destitution. We will pray for the professionals in health, education, social care, local government and other walks of life who have endured such a stressful and challenging year. And we will pray for our churches and for Christians who have felt again and again the desolate pain of being denied access to the sacraments of life.

Christians are often tempted to reach too soon for easy answers to complex problems or contrive shallow 'good news stories' out of the gloom. But like Our Lady who simply stayed with her Son on the hill of Calvary, 23 March will be for us a time to stand by the cross and unite ourselves in prayer with all whose lives have been damaged by the pandemic.

There are many who will ask, 'Where is God in all this?' But as we live through Passiontide and mark the rites of Holy Week, it is in worship that we find the answers to that question, for we have a God who in Christ unites himself with human suffering and death in order to transform them in the light of His Cross and Resurrection.

The Christ who washed feet is present alongside those medical professionals who tend to the needs of the sick and dying. The Christ who feeds us under the signs of bread and wine locates himself with the hungry and the destitute. The Christ who lays down his life on the cross assumes to himself death in order to destroy it. The Christ who rises gloriously on the third day shows that those who are baptised into him are a new creation, set free from sin and death and all that is at enmity with human flourishing.

Our worship in Holy Week is so much more than a re-telling of a story from the past. In our worship we bring the saving power of Jesus Christ breaking into the present and so bear witness to the truth that the pain and loss of this past year cannot last, for the victory has already been won. So, we are inviting all those who look to our care as bishops not just to pray on 23 March, but to commit themselves with greater dedication than ever to a devout keeping of Holy Week.

If it you are able, please make every effort to join with your fellow Christians in public worship, especially for the Triduum on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. And if you do not feel able to attend in person, unite yourself to the worship of the church as best you can through making use of our online resources [link].

It is a cause of huge sadness to us as Catholic Bishops that so few of our laypeople will be able to attend the Chrism Masses this year [link] (and indeed that in some cases the rites normally associated with the Chrism Mass will need to wait until the feast of Pentecost this year) but you will be at the centre of our prayers as your bishops, priests and deacons commit their lives afresh to serving you.

St. Paul writes in the First Letter to the Corinthians, ‘...the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.’ On 23 March we will stand by the cross and pray for all the victims of the pandemic, most especially the departed. But in that instrument of death, we find life as God’s power is revealed. As you encounter the cross this Passiontide, may you also discover afresh the hope of the resurrection and the perfect joy of the new creation.

With our prayers over Holy Week and Eastertide,

+ TONY WAKEFIELD	The Rt Revd Tony Robinson, Bishop of Wakefield, Chairman of The Society’s Council of Bishops
+ GLYN BEVERLEY	The Rt Revd Glyn Webster, Bishop of Beverley
+ PHILIP BURNLEY	The Rt Revd Philip North, Bishop of Burnley
+ MARTIN CICESTR	The Rt Revd Martin Warner, Bishop of Chichester
+ JONATHAN EBBSFLEET	The Rt Revd Jonathan Goodall, Bishop of Ebbsfleet
+ JONATHAN FULHAM	The Rt Revd Jonathan Baker, Bishop of Fulham
+ WILLIAM LEWES	The Rt Revd Will Hazlewood, Bishop of Lewes
+ NORMAN RICHBOROUGH	The Rt Revd Norman Banks, Bishop of Richborough

(1) This year The Society, together with the Catholic Societies of the Church of England, will offer their annual Requiem Mass, which is generously sponsored by the Guild of All Souls, for those who have died during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Mass will take place at St. Stephen, Gloucester Road at 7pm on Thursday 4 November and will be live streamed. The streaming details will be made available nearer the time on the websites of The Society, the Guild of All Souls, and St. Stephen, Gloucester Road.